1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

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IT BEFITS the science of man that its practitioners should depend entirely upon human support and human kindness. The number of persons to whom the two authors have repaired, severally and collectively, is larger than can appear here. We can only hope that the many whom we cannot name will know, as we do, how impossible the production of this book would have been without the help they gave.

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16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
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Foreword

About the Series

000 These case studies in cultural anthropology are designed to bring to students, in beginning and intermediate courses in the social sciences, insights into the richness and complexity of human life as it is lived in different ways and in different places. They are written by men and women who have lived in the societies they write about and who are professionally trained as observers and interpreters of human behavior. The authors are also teachers, and in writing their books they have kept the students who will read them foremost in their minds. It is our belief that when an understanding of ways of life very different from one's own is gained, abstractions and generalizations about social structure, cultural values, subsistence techniques, and the other universal categories of human social behavior become meaningful.

About the Author

114 John C. Messenger is a professor in the Department of Anthropology, the Folklore Institute, and the Program of African Studies at Indiana University. He received his Ph.D. from Northwestern University and taught at Michigan State University and Carleton College before joining the Indiana University [122] faculty. In 1951 and 1952, he conducted fieldwork among the Anang of southeastern Nigeria as an Area Research Training Fellow of the Social Science Research Council; his research during 1959 and 1960, which provided the bulk of the data reported herein, was supported by an Exchange Scholarship to Eire administered by An Bord Scolairteachtai Comalairte of Dublin. Professor Messenger has published numerous articles, chapters in books, and monographs concerning the cultures of the Anang, the Irish, and the Montserrat islanders of the West Indies, whom he studied in 1965 and 1967. A grant from the Indiana University Ford International Program enabled him to write a substantial portion of this volume.

About the Book

114 This is a case study of a people widely known through the media of
121 journalism and film. Imbedded in a context of romanticism and nativism, the
123 image of the people and their culture created by these media scarcely approximates reality, for reasons that Dr. Messenger makes clear both in his discussion of nativism and the reasons for its strong influence on characterizations of Irish folk,

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114 The role of the church in Irish history has been well documented, albeit often in a biased manner because of the prejudices of certain historians, but its role in shaping Irish culture and personality has been little examined. Irish social scientists either have been oblivious to it because of being Catholics themselves, or have been fearful of the political and religious consequences were they to pursue and publish the "truth;" foreign scientists, on the other hand, have shown little interest in Ireland, or have suppressed their data on religious influences in order to be able to return there to do further research.

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815 Whereas in developing countries anthropologists are being restricted increasingly by elitists sensitive to the primitive conditions in their nations which are being studied and publicized by scientists, in Ireland similar reactions of nativists, including those who are in the government, are compounded by those of the church. The resistance of the church to objective scrutiny in large measure explains the absence of ethnology—with its emphasis on such values as empiricism, naturalism, relativism, and pluralism—as a discipline in the national universities. Irish scholars have tended to stress economic and other monistic causes (especially climate, race, English oppression, the famine, and loss of the Irish tongue) in their [123] analyses of culture and personality phenomena. I have talked with Irish scientists about religious forces as aspects of particular phenomena, and have been told that to acknowledge certain of these in print would be to commit job suicide. [122] When I have discussed with them my own conclusions about factors accounting for such conditions in Inis Beag as celibacy, late marriage, personality disorders, and emigration, and have cited religious causes as among the most significant ones, my listeners have agreed tacitly and changed the subject, or have remained silent. Irish scientists visiting the United States, I might add, usually endorse my views but often ask not to be quoted abroad or in print. Religious causes are, in fact, so important and pervasive that one runs the risk of being declared a "religious determinist" if he deals objectively with his materials.

793 The bishop and the parish priest in theory direct the actions of the curate in Inis Beag, but it is believed by the folk that their control over him in reality is only nominal, and that he often is able to make and carry out major decisions affecting the welfare of the islanders without consulting his superiors. His supposed freedom of action is reflected in the commonly voiced complaint that if word of his secular "excesses" were to reach the bishop, he would be reprimanded or replaced. However, some say that his policies are known and secretly approved [123] of by his superiors. It is rumored that I was responsible for the replacement of a curate by complaining of his opposition to my research and certain of his excesses to mainlanders who had the "ear of the bishop."

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793 The folk are devoutly Catholic, despite the fact that they are extremely
795 critical of their priests and retain and reinterpret pagan religious forms. They are
181 proud of their strength of belief, with its attendant morality, and of the sanctity of "Inis Beag of the Saints," and they look to the curate for spiritual comfort, as well as political guidance in several spheres, and are uncomfortable in his absence.
[789] His presence, it is believed, provides supernatural protection for the island, while
[776] his absence invites possible anti-social behavior, and harm to the soul of one who

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closely approximate those for Aughnaboy; only the severity classification in Inis Beag differs, with gossip most prevalent followed by withdrawal, argument, and interference.

A further step in Leyton's analysis is his examination of the severity of disputes and the issues provoking them with relation to the four categories of persons involved. Jealousy and personality clashes, in that order, are the causes of disputes between affinal kin in Aughnaboy, which give rise to withdrawal and argument. In the case of agnatic kin, the causes are personality clashes and economic conflict, and withdrawal and argument are the sole responses; the same causes apply to disputes between non-kin, but interference rather than withdrawal is by far the most conspicuous response. Disputes between uterine kin are negligible. These rank orders are in accord with those of Inis Beag except for the predominance of interference in disputes between non-kin; on the island, gossip and withdrawal outweigh interference. The major disputes in Inis Beag are: between spouses and between mothers and daughters-in-law among affinal kin; between fathers and sons, between brothers, and between brothers and sisters among agnatic kin; and between families, between shopkeepers, and between particular individuals who are distantly or not related. Since disputes between agnatic, uterine, and affinal kin have been discussed in the last two sections, I will consider here only disputes between non-kin.

At least eight family disputes are ongoing in Inis Beag today, one of which has roots in events of a century ago (Another is supported by the exhortations of a ghost, as we shall see in the next chapter.). All are the result of past and present contests over the ownership and inheritance of land, and of past personality clashes which have led to violent argument and interference, especially physical violence, and have come to involve near cognates of the original enemies—"a clash between two individuals soon becomes a clash between two groups of kin." This type of factionalism gives rise mostly to gossip and the avoidance of one another by members of the contending families; only on rare occasions, usually at large social gatherings after much drink has been taken by the men, will disputants engage in face-to-face argument, which soon can provoke fighting between two and sometimes more persons. Fights are short-lived, inasmuch as other islanders, the headmaster, or the priest intervene to redress "the delicate balance of power . . . between the separate groups of kin." Legal suits over land ownership and inheritance have been many during the past three decades, and on several occasions guards have been summoned to Inis Beag by feuding families to investigate cases of physical violence and the destruction of property. Theft as a form of interference is practically unknown on the island. Economic conflict and the clash of personalities also underlie the dispute between the two shopkeepers, and gossip and withdrawal characterize their relationship, just as that between members of disputing families.

Since most of the folk in Inis Beag are related at least distantly, the term non-kin denotes both "those I have a relationship with" and those who are unrelated. Leyton finds that most non-kin disputes in Aughnaboy involve at least one person who has no effective kin; this situation does not exist in the island where everyone has effective kin. By far the greatest number of disputes between non-kin in Inis Beag occur between members of the same sex and involve men rather than

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779 The islanders know little of church dogma and the purport of rituals and feast days. What knowledge they do possess often is distorted, and they seldom read the Bible or manuals of instruction or engage in doctrinal discussions among themselves. I discovered by consulting priests and church histories, dictionaries, and exegeses—both before and during my stay in Inis Beag—that I came to know far more about the faith than any of the folk, and I sometimes imparted what I had learned to the curious in homes and even in the pubs. Instruction is welcomed by the islanders, but they dislike criticism from any quarter of their idiosyncratic Catholic observances, pagan retentions and reinterpretations, and non-Christian behavior. They also dislike being told, especially by returned emigrants, that "Catholic culture" in Ireland is quite unlike that in other parts of the world and arouses dismay and even incredulity in many foreign Catholics who visit Ireland.

[122] [123]

771 793 776 165 The paths to salvation, according to the islanders, are threefold: obeying the curate, performing the rituals of the church diligently and punctiliously, and conforming to the moral laws of Christianity. Being saved, however, is to them much more a matter of escaping Hell than of achieving Purgatory and eventually Heaven, and they experience more anxiety about failing to conform to the moral laws than pride in conforming to them. Furthermore, it is sins of thought rather than sins of deed which preoccupy them. While they boast of their morality as expressed in behavior, they labor under a heavy burden of guilt arising out of repressed sexual desires, jealousy and envy of their neighbors, and anti-clerical sentiment, among other attitudes. It is difficult for most of them to confess these to the priest, and thus their feelings of guilt and fear of damnation are compounded. Many times in Inis Beag I heard a "good Catholic" defined as one who "thinks mostly of death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell" and guides his conduct accordingly. Life on earth is regarded as merely a brief prelude to the "eternity stretching beyond the grave," to be lived only in preparation for the Day of Judgment and borne patiently in all its "pain and suffering." Priests and nuns are envied for many reasons, among them the fact that they can "spend most of their time preparing for death" and thus are in a better position to achieve salvation.

771 562 [829] [788] It is apparent to outside observers and to the folk alike that women are more pious than men. They attend church more regularly, are more serious of mien at mass and during other religious observances, and are more prone to talk of religious matters than men. Many women go to mass daily, and it is said that all of the women of the island, but only ten men, have evaded going to Hell magically by attending mass nine Fridays in succession after Ash Wednesday (or, according to some, the first Friday in each month for nine successive months, or the first Friday after Ash Wednesday for nine years in succession). The reasons for this are several, but the most important are that women are less contented than men and thus have a greater need for the solace that religion affords, and they are more restricted socially than men and by fulfilling various church obligations can escape household confinement and interact with other women. Some islanders are thought to be overly pious—"wear their religion on their sleeves"—and are subjects of amusement and derision; those who use piety to cloak avarice

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JOHN C. MESSENGER*

SEX AND REPRESSION IN AN IRISH FOLK COMMUNITY

In this chapter I will discuss sexual repression—its manifestations in behavior and beliefs, its causes, its inculcation, and its broader historical and cultural implications—in a small island community of the Gaeltacht that I will call Inis Beag.[1] My wife and I conducted ethnographic research there for nineteen months, between 1958 and 1966, which included a one-year stay and eight other visits of from one to seven weeks—at Christmas or during the summer. Ours is the only holistic ethnographic study of this community, although archeologists, linguists, philologists, folklorists, geographers, anthropometricians, and other scientists have undertaken research there for over a century. We collected a large body of culture and personality data on three other Irish islands for the purposes of making comparisons and testing hypotheses concerning culture and personality concomitants of island living. Inis Beag is ideally suited to ethnographic and folklore research in that its population possesses a tradition which is less acculturated than that of any other local Irish group.

According to anthropological definition (Lewis 1960: 1–2), the islanders qualify as folk people in almost every respect. The community has maintained its stability for at least 200 years; there is a strong bond between the peasants and their land, and agriculture provides them with

* A grant from the Indiana University Ford International Program enabled me to write this chapter.

[1] For other reports on Inis Beag, consult Messenger 1962, 1968, and 1969.